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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000360

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE HAMIDOU BABA KANE: "YES WE KANE"

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 271

Classified By: Ambassador Mark M. Boulware for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Hamidou Baba Kane is one of two Afro-Mauritanian candidates in the upcoming June 6 presidential elections. The Vice President of the National Assembly (and former Vice President in Ahmed Ould Daddah's RFD party), Kane claims he is still a member of RFD, even though Daddah expelled him. When asked about rumors stating that Aziz would appoint Kane as President of the National Assembly, Kane issued a weak non-denial, only increasing speculation that he is expecting something tangible in return for his participation in elections that he has no hope of winning. End summary.

¶2. (C) PolAsst met with presidential candidate Hamidou Baba Kane on May 21. Kane is one of two Afro-Mauritanians running for president in the June 6 elections (the other is Ibrahima Sarr, Ref A). Kane is Vice President of the National Assembly. He was also Vice President in Ahmed Ould Daddah's RFD party, before being expelled by Daddah from the party on April 11, after Daddah accused him of "sowing discord within the ranks of the party" and "collaborating with the military authority currently in place."

¶3. (C) Campaign delay: Kane had just returned from a meeting with Senegalese Foreign Minister Gadio and two other presidential candidates to discuss a possible delay in the start of the campaign. Measuring his words carefully, Kane began by saying that Gadio had proposed a 48-hour delay in the start of the campaign in an effort to continue talks. Kane said he and candidate Ibrahima Sarr had "no problem" in accepting a delay, but Sghair Ould M'Bareck did not want to delay his campaign. Comment: Tellingly, Aziz himself was not present at the meeting (and subsequently began his campaign that evening in Kiffa). In any event, the plan went nowhere, and the campaigns began as originally scheduled. End comment.

¶4. (C) His candidacy: Turning to his campaign and candidacy, Kane said the first thing he would do as president was "form a national unity government, renew the political class, and instill good governance." Additionally, he would undertake educational reform, saying that the youth were an

important part of his campaign. In the same vein, he reiterated his campaign slogan -- "Yes We Kane" -- that attempts to tap the enthusiasm that President Obama's election unleashed in Africa and the rest of the world. On the foreign policy front, he asserted that Mauritania had three identities -- Islamic, Arab, and African. Therefore, its foreign policy must reflect this reality as well; he vowed to return Mauritania to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). (Note: Mauritania withdrew from ECOWAS in 1999. End note.) He described Europe as a "privileged partner," but for the United States, all he said was that due to its power and influence, "relations must be taken into account," and the two countries should work together on terrorism, drug trafficking, and illegal immigration. Comment: PolAsst had the distinct impression that Kane was merely saying what he thought the U.S. wanted to hear. End comment.

15. (C) The RFD split: Asked about his status with the RFD, Kane declared "I am still a member of RFD," conveniently overlooking Daddah's expulsion of him from the party. However, he admitted there was a "divergence" between him and Daddah, and that they had not spoken to each other in months. Attacking Daddah directly, he said "I didn't change my ideals for personal ambitions" like Daddah did. Nevertheless, he claimed "it was not my intention to break apart the RFD." Comment: Kane is either extremely naive, which is unlikely, or he was fully aware of the chaos and divisions his candidacy would cause within the RFD. End comment.

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16. (C) President of the National Assembly: PolAsst asked about rumors that said in the event of an Aziz electoral victory, Aziz would dissolve parliament and designate Kane as President of the National Assembly. Kane averted his gaze and said simply, "My ambition is for President of the Republic, not for President of the National Assembly."

17. (C) Comment: Watching carefully what he says, Kane comes across as someone jockeying for position. He surely realizes that he has no chance of winning the election against Aziz, and having burned his bridges with the RFD, is standing as a candidate in the hope of gaining something tangible. It is almost certain Aziz or his supporters are assisting Kane; in what capacity, however, is unknown. His weak non-denial of having interest in the Presidency of the National Assembly only fuels speculation that there is a quid pro quo agreement between Kane and Aziz -- you help legitimize my election, and I'll give you a prominent position in government. End comment.
BOULWARE